

# The Power Mr. Lloyd George Takes With Him to Paris

# An Assessment of the Tremendous Backing Recently Given Him

By S. K. Ratcliffe

A FEW points about the British general election are perfectly plain to everybody. It was a Lloyd George and Victory election. It has confirmed Mr. George in power with an emphasis which no one among his opponents has sought to minimize. A triumph for him, it is also a triumph for the Conservatives. The Liberal party, after a long spell of power, is divided and impotent. With a ruthlessness beyond precedent in the political history of Britain the electorate has swept away the candidates, both Liberal and Labor, whose record on the war does not meet the challenge of simple nationalism and patriotism. This resonant result has the effect of carrying the Prime Minister to Paris with a backing so tremendous that he can, to all appearance, speak with an authority greater than that of any other member of the peace conference.

These things are obvious and undeniable. They have been recorded and annotated all over the world, and there is no need to enforce them here or to add anything in praise of the generalship displayed by the most accomplished political strategist of his time.

## The Victory In Figures

But there are other facts that need to be brought out if we would get anything like a correct view of the election and its momentous result. Consider, first, the figures as they stand. In the House of Commons as changed by the recent reform act there are 707 members. Of these 471 are definitely labelled as supporters of the Coalition government: Conservatives 334, Liberals 127, Labor 10. Add forty-six, who are classed simply as Unionists or Conservatives. Of these some are Tories of the more extreme kind who dislike Mr. Lloyd George. They are following him, until the peace, reluctantly or rebelliously. Turn to the other side. The Opposition is made up as follows:

|                         |    |
|-------------------------|----|
| Asquith Liberals.....   | 37 |
| Labor .....             | 63 |
| Sinn Féin .....         | 78 |
| Irish Nationalists..... | 7  |
| National Party.....     | 2  |
| Socialist .....         | 1  |
| Independents .....      | 5  |

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From that 120, however, we must subtract the seventy-three Sinn Féiners, who declare that they will not take their seats at Westminster. Hence Mr. George would seem to command altogether 517 votes, and to be opposed by only 117, even if we count in all the doubtful items on the anti-Coalition list. There has, of course, never been a House of Commons to be compared with this. In the Gladstonian period a majority of about 120 was considered immense. The two elections of the Balfour-Chamberlain reaction gave the Conservatives a majority, roughly, of 150 over the Liberals and Irish Nationalists combined. There has, however, been one election in our time which furnishes an interesting parallel—namely, the Liberal avalanche of 1906. The results of that conflict stood thus:

|                     |     |
|---------------------|-----|
| Liberals .....      | 379 |
| Labor .....         | 51  |
| Nationalists .....  | 83  |
| Conservatives ..... | 157 |

That is to say, the Opposition, in a slightly smaller House, was forty more than the present Opposition, leaving out Sinn Féin; and it was solid—not, as the present Opposition is, split up into irreconcilable factions.

The two lists, of 1906 and 1913, reveal an extraordinary change in the character of Parliament. The old party lines have gone. The large compact parties of the past are not what they were—with one important exception. The group system, familiar for so long in France and Central Europe, is emerging, but not on the Conservative side. It is true that the huge block of members now supporting the Coalition is composite, and that with the first serious change in the Coalition itself the sections will fall apart. But in the new House the Conservatives alone are a great and powerful single party. They number just one more (380 as against 379) than the Liberal phalanx of 1906. Or, to put it in a sentence: After five years of Lloyd George as radical reformer and four and a half years of Lloyd George as war-time leader, the Conservative party occupies precisely the position taken by the Liberals in the year of the overwhelming Liberal triumph. It is a most singular and thought-provoking result.

### ***Why a Conservative Torrent?***

Here is the first matter calling for analysis. One London newspaper made the somewhat startling statement that the victory was due to Mr. Bonar Law, official leader of the Conservative party. That, of course, is not so: for, without Mr. Lloyd

dates. But he did not leave the Liberal party or join the rival organization. As head of a war cabinet he was all the stronger on that account. But manifestly the arrangement would not do for fighting purposes in an election. A leader must have an organization. Even a Lloyd George cannot fight as a single champion. There could be no reunion with the official Liberals, although overtures were made. If they had been successful, and Lloyd George had, after the two Coalition governments, stood forth again as joint Liberal leader (it was in any case not possible) he could not have won the electoral victory necessary for his purpose. Consequently, the necessary first step was a firm understanding with the Conservative machine, and a complete alliance, in the constituencies, with Mr. Bonar Law.

## The Liberal Rout

The tactical scheme was bound to be fatal to the Asquith party. And as the fight proceeded it became clearer and clearer that the double lack of programme and leadership meant disaster. Mr. Asquith recovered something of his old energy as a campaigner, but he could make no headway. In his Scottish constituency, where for a quarter of a century he was supreme, the hecklers got after him. Mr. Lloyd George now and again made effective play with his old leader's arguments. The Coalition press was merciless. And, as a result, the most experienced parliamentarian of his time has no seat in the new House of Commons. All his principal colleagues are in like case.—Sir John Simon, Reginald McKenna, Herbert Samuel, Walter Runciman. It is an overthrow almost exactly similar to that which befell Mr. Balfour and his colleagues in 1906. In that contest, however, a few Conservative leaders survived. Mr. As-

quith has gone down with all his lieutenants—except those who, in 1918, went over to Mr. George. The very large majorities against them serve to emphasize a circumstance which is undoubtedly significant—the disappearance, for a time, of Liberalism as a middle way in a world passing through a profound social change. The question will be asked on all hands: Are we, in all countries, approaching the time when those who stand substantially for the old order, whether they call themselves Liberal or Conservative, will be driven to make common cause against the multiple forces of revolution?

## And Labor, Too

It should, however, be made clear that the relative strength of parties after an election such as this is never an accurate index of the voting. In Great Britain there is practically no representation of minorities. The new parliamentary Reform act has effected a revision of the electoral districts, but has made no provision for any form of proportional representation—the expedient for which reformers like H. G. Wells have argued with so much persistence and enthusiasm. When the full particulars are available it will be found, first, that the total national poll was surprisingly small (certainly not more than 50

# In the Mandate of the British Voter at the Elec- tion

per cent). Second, that the redistribution of seats was worked markedly to the advantage of the Coalition, and, third, that on the basis of the total poll the anti-Coalition parties have done much better than the parliamentary figures suggest. Labor leaders such as Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden, for example, have suffered a more complete overthrow this time than, probably, they would have done under the old voting conditions. In the last House Ramsay MacDonald shared the representation of Leicester with a leading Liberal member of the Coalition government. Under the new scheme the city is divided into two single-member divisions, so that MacDonald, instead of having a chance of the second place on the poll, had to stand up to the full combined attack of Conservative, Liberal and pro-Coalition Labor. Small wonder that he was beaten to a frazzle. His victorious opponent is J. F.

Green, an able representative of a class very small in England—those intellectuals who have thrown in their lot with Labor, are the engine for the Coalition against Henderson and MacDonald and upon the most downright nationalist and patriotic platform. Mr. Green has spent half a lifetime in the old peace propaganda—so curious are the transformations of the world crisis. The defeat of Arthur Henderson is still unexplained. Most likely it would not have been anything like so overwhelming if he had not abandoned his Yorkshire constituency and tried his fortune in a riverside district of East London. With Henderson and Snowden go W. C. Anderson, F. W. Jowett and other Northern Labor leaders who have been on the unpopular side in the war. These men and several of their companions in misfortune are among the most experienced of their class as parliamentarians. Pending another general election they will, like the Asquith group, have to take advantage of by-elections. And, being relieved from the arduous duty of attendance in Westminster, they will be free to continue the work of their movement throughout the country during the period of demobilization. In the meantime, the ablest representatives of Labor in the Commons will be J. H. Thomas, who until lately was leader of the railwaymen's union, and J. R. Clynes, the former Lancashire cotton operator, who is as usual as we have made good in the office of Food Controller.

## Why No Women M.P.'s?

There will be no women members of the new Parliament when it assembles toward the end of the winter. The only woman elected—Countess Markiewicz, an Irish woman married to a Russian—is a Sinn Féin, and, presumably, will not take her seat. Among the twenty or so women candidates were some of the ablest organizers and most effective speakers in the country. Christabel Pankhurst was beaten in a square fight with a Labor man. Mrs. Snowden shared her husband's disaster. Mary MacArthur, who has done one of the great jobs of war time in the organization of women's war work, has fared no better. Mrs. Bethick Lawrence, Mrs. Oliver Strachey, Miss Violet Markham, and others failed—several of them in part, no doubt, because of their attitude toward the war policy. It is rather strange, since a general election always provides a few notable surprises, that at least one woman in England or Scotland should not have passed the barrier. But it must be remembered that this is the first occasion upon which British women have exercised the parliamentary franchise. The woman voter is a novelty; the woman M. P. must, to most men and women citizens, still seem too strange for acceptance.

## *Ireland and Sinn Fein*

The seventy-three Sinn Féin members are not in any sense a surprise. For two years it has been known that the first general election would put an end to the old Nationalist party. The suspension of the Liberal Home Rule Act was a heavy blow to John Redmond and his followers. The Dublin rebellion finished them. There could be no successor to Redmond. Since Easter, 1916, Sinn Féin has been in the ascendant in Ireland, and every instructed observer has foreseen the present crisis. If the seventy-three should proclaim themselves to be a national assembly and should begin a legislative boycott of England and the Empire, we must be prepared for grave developments. It is not hard to predict that here Mr. Lloyd George, at the head of a reconstructed government, will meet his first challenge; and it is one upon which the eyes of the world will be set. One thing at least may be said: Mr. George is original and adventurous. If he is not equal to the challenge, certainly none of his colleagues, or of his Liberal opponents, could be named as more likely to find the way out.

## The Greatest Opportunity

The result of the election provides Lloyd George with a wonderful, an unprecedented opportunity. Upon that all parties are agreed. The Peace Conference, Ireland and Labor—the great questions, or rather groups of questions, await him on the threshold of his new administration. In regard to the first, his repeated declarations have made clear that he is in complete agreement with all the essential part of President Wilson's policy; and in so far as that agreement is emphasized in the Paris the Prime Minister will have the support of the Liberals and of Labor. Of Ireland it is impossible to say more at present. In regard to all matters of domestic settlement and reconstruction, Mr. George will need to find his way direct to the collective aspiration and will of the mass of the British people. Upon the crucial point Mr. George, as upon all recent speeches show, is undoubtedly misapprehension. His government will be overwhelmingly Conservative, in conformity with the membership of his majority. But Mr. George knows that the voice of the people, so largely soldiers, workmen and women, who have placed this superb opportunity in his hands, were not given to him because he is allied with Bonar Law and Lord Curzon and Lord Milner, or because he has accepted the implications of that alliance. They were given to him because of his war record, because he led the government in the final stage of the war, because the world has agreed to salute him as a leader of vision and genius, a man who gets things done. During the campaign, and since the election, he has proclaimed that the new House must support him in his programme of reconstruction. If it cannot do so, he will appeal again to the people. And that, we may be sure, he will be ready to do.

